



SENATOR RUNNER'S WEEK IN REVIEW

A WEEKLY REVIEW THAT WILL KEEP YOU INFORMED AND UP-TO-DATE



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California Levees: State of Emergency

Levee maintenance is critical to California, as we have seen the results of levee breaks in New Orleans and the effects of Hurricane Katrina. This disaster brings a question to mind: is California prepared for disaster? We may not have to worry about hurricanes or tornados; however, we do have floods and earthquakes. Will our levees hold up against a substantial shaker?

As recently as June 2004, we witnessed the levee break on the Jones Track levee just outside of Stockton, in Northern California. This levee break could be a foreshadowing of what is to come if nothing is done to repair the sorry condition of our levees. According to the California Department of Water Resources, it will take more that \$1.3 billion to repair California's levees. This amount does not even include preparing our levees for seismic damage. In order to make our levees earthquake proof, we would need to start all over and build new levees.

Our past efforts to maintain California levees were woefully insufficient as they were designed poorly, followed by inadequate maintenance that led to our crisis today. Instead of taking the time to build and repair our levees using quality materials when the cost was only \$300 per linear foot, we used scrap materials that held no longevity and we are now forced to make repairs costing over \$5,000 per linear foot. Multiply that number by the thousands of *miles* that need repair and you can see this pending financial crisis.

A major problem in repairing our levee system is the inflated flood control costs. Levee repair that requires the relocation of vegetation must replace the plants at a 5 to 1 ratio, making it 5 times more expensive. Also, due to some endangered species habitats, maintenance on the levees may only occur between the months of October and May, leaving just a five-month window for repairs. Obstacles like these stand in the way of making our levee system work smoothly. We need to reprioritize when it comes to levee work and recognize that our first priority should be public safety.

In addition to repairing our existing levees, California may look to other ways of preventing further damage to our water crisis. The California Federal Ecosystem Directorate (CALFED) program is studying proposals to increase the upstream water storage which would relieve pressure on

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[Governor Vetoes Minimum Wage Legislation](#)

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[Runner's Charter School Accountability Measure Signed into Law](#)

[Runners Committed to Passing Jessica's Law](#)

[San Bernardino Sun Editorial: Sexual Predator Put On Notice](#)

[Governor Ousts Flood Board](#)

downstream levees. With less pressure on levees, the likelihood of levee breaks and damages are greatly reduced. Unfortunately, environmentalists have for years blocked all efforts at increasing water storage for ideological reasons. In the last water bond that was adopted by the voters, more than \$1.9 billion in bonds were issued and not one dime was invested in new storage opportunities and little was invested in the general improvement of existing infrastructure.

Governor Schwarzenegger also recognizes the importance of levee maintenance and the importance of providing it the necessary funding. This is why in mid-September, he asked the federal government for \$90 million to fund the repairs of the most crucial sections of levees in the Delta and Central Valley. The state could then match the federal funding. This is just a drop in the bucket of the type of investment that is necessary to sufficiently bolster our state's sagging levee system and restore the luster of the Golden States' infrastructure.

California is engaging in a dangerous game of chicken with our levees. It is only a matter of time before we see a disaster like the one we just witnessed in Louisiana. We need to establish a multi-prong strategy to ensure the safety of the public which would include: 1) a plan to fix the levees that desperately need immediate repair; 2) a long-term plan on how to implement continuous maintenance of our levees; and 3) seek and implement innovative solutions to relieve pressure from our levee systems.

This is a matter that needs serious consideration and the Legislature must stop the delay and take action when we reconvene in January 2006.

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